CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND NINETY-SEVENTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 11 June 1998, at 10.15 a.m.

President: Mr. Sungar (Turkey)

GE.98-62504 (E)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 797th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

I should like at the outset, on behalf of the Conference, to convey to the delegation of Nigeria our condolences on the passing away of its head of State, General Sani Abacha.

I have on my list of speakers for today firstly, the Special Coordinator on prevention of an arms race in outer space, Ambassador Palihakkara of Sri Lanka, and then the representative of Sweden, Ambassador Norberg, followed by the representative of Brazil, Ambassador Lafer, on behalf of the Group of 21.

Before giving the floor to the first speaker, I should like to inform you that immediately following this plenary meeting we shall hold informal open-ended consultations on agenda item 1, entitled "Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament", in this room.

I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka, Ambassador Palihakkara, who will speak in his capacity as Special Coordinator on prevention of an arms race in outer space.

Mr. PALIHAKKARA (Sri Lanka): Before I proceed, may I also convey to the delegation of Nigeria the condolences of my Government and my delegation on the passing away of the head of State, General Sani Abacha?

I have requested the floor in my capacity as Special Coordinator on prevention of an arms race in outer space to make a brief progress report on consultations that I have carried out. I am obliged to do so at this plenary as I will be away from Geneva next week.

Pursuant to the decision of the Conference on Disarmament concerning the appointment of Special Coordinator on agenda item 3, "Prevention of an arms race in outer space" (CD/1501), I have held a series of consultations, bilaterally and multilaterally, including open-ended consultations held on 5 June 1998.

There was general recognition that item 3 of the CD's agenda continues to be one of importance and urgency, and delegations showed readiness to contribute towards that common objective in a constructive spirit. It was also generally understood that while there continues to be no objection in principle to the re-establishment of an ad hoc committee, further consultations would be needed as to when that decision can be taken. Meanwhile, several constructive ideas were considered during open-ended and other consultations concerning updating of the mandate of the Ad Hoc Committee contained in the decision of the CD dated 13 February 1992, as also referred to in United Nations General Assembly resolution 52/37.

It was also evident that some delegations needed time to consider all related aspects of the issue and the timing of the establishment of the ad hoc

(Mr. Palihakkara, Sri Lanka)

committee. I would continue with my consultations and, given the wide measure of support and constructive spirit displayed by all delegations, hope to submit in due course a conclusive report including a revised draft mandate.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Special Coordinator for the presentation of his progress report. I now give the floor to the representative of Sweden, Ambassador Lars Norberg.

Mr. NORBERG (Sweden): I have asked for the floor to present on behalf of the delegations of Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Slovenia, South Africa and Sweden the joint declaration related to nuclear disarmament issued on 9 June 1998 by the Foreign Ministers of these countries. The nuclear disarmament process needs a new and forceful impetus. We call on all States to join us in our efforts for the early achievement of a nuclear-weapon-free world. The joint declaration reads as follows:

"We, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Slovenia, South Africa and Sweden, have considered the continued threat to humanity represented by the perspective of the indefinite possession of nuclear weapons by the nuclear-weapon States, as well as by those three nuclear-weapons-capable States that have not acceded to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the attendant possibility of use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. The seriousness of this predicament has been further underscored by the recent nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan.

"We fully share the conclusion expressed by the commissioners of the Canberra Commission that 'the proposition that nuclear weapons can be retained in perpetuity and never used - accidentally or by decision - defies credibility. The only complete defence is the elimination of nuclear weapons and assurance that they will never be produced again.'

"We recall that the General Assembly of the United Nations already in January 1946 - in its very first resolution - unanimously called for a commission to make proposals for 'the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and of all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction'. While we can rejoice at the achievement of the international community in concluding total and global prohibitions on chemical and biological weapons by the conventions of 1972 and 1993, we equally deplore the fact that the countless resolutions and initiatives which have been guided by similar objectives in respect of nuclear weapons in the past half-century remain unfulfilled.

"We can no longer remain complacent at the reluctance of the nuclear-weapon States and the three nuclear-weapons-capable States to take that fundamental and requisite step, namely a clear commitment to the speedy, final and total elimination of their nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons capability, and we urge them to take that step now.

"The vast majority of the membership of the United Nations has entered into legally binding commitments not to receive, manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

(Mr. Norberg, Sweden)

These undertakings have been made in the context of the corresponding legally binding commitments by the nuclear-weapon States to the pursuit of nuclear disarmament. We are deeply concerned at the persistent reluctance of the nuclear-weapon States to approach their treaty obligations as an urgent commitment to the total elimination of their nuclear weapons.

"In this connection, we recall the unanimous conclusion of the International Court of Justice in its 1996 advisory opinion that there exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.

"The international community must not enter the third millennium with the prospect that the maintenance of these weapons will be considered legitimate for the indefinite future, when the present juncture provides a unique opportunity to eradicate and prohibit them for all time. We therefore call on the Governments of each of the nuclear-weapon States and the three nuclear-weapons-capable States to commit themselves unequivocally to the elimination of their respective nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons capability and to agree to start work immediately on the practical steps and negotiations required for its achievement.

"We agree that the measures resulting from such undertakings leading to the total elimination of nuclear weapons will begin with those States that have the largest arsenals. But we also stress the importance that they be joined in a seamless process by those with lesser arsenals at the appropriate juncture. The nuclear-weapon States should immediately begin to consider steps to be taken to this effect.

"In this connection, we welcome both the achievements to date and the future promise of the START process as an appropriate bilateral and subsequently plurilateral mechanism including all the nuclear-weapon States, for the practical dismantlement and destruction of nuclear armaments undertaken in pursuit of the elimination of nuclear weapons.

"The actual elimination of nuclear arsenals, and the development of requisite verification regimes, will of necessity require time. But there are a number of practical steps that the nuclear-weapon States can, and should, take immediately. We call on them to abandon present hair-trigger postures by proceeding to de-alert and de-activate their weapons. They should also remove non-strategic nuclear weapons from deployed sites. Such measures will create beneficial conditions for continued disarmament efforts and help prevent inadvertent, accidental or unauthorized launches.

"In order for the nuclear disarmament process to proceed, the three nuclear-weapons-capable States must clearly and urgently reverse the pursuit of their respective nuclear weapons development or deployment and refrain from any actions which could undermine the efforts of the international community towards nuclear disarmament. We

(Mr. Norberg, Sweden)

call upon them, and all other States that have not yet done so, to adhere to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and take the necessary measures which flow from adherence to this instrument. We likewise call upon them to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty without delay and without conditions.

"An international ban on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices ('cut-off') would further underpin the process towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons. As agreed in 1995 by the States parties to the NPT, negotiations on such a convention should commence immediately.

"Disarmament measures alone will not bring about a world free from nuclear weapons. Effective international cooperation to prevent the proliferation of these weapons is vital and must be enhanced through, inter alia, the extension of controls over all fissile material and other relevant components of nuclear weapons. The emergence of any new nuclear-weapon State, as well as any non-State entity in a position to produce or otherwise acquire such weapons, seriously jeopardizes the process of eliminating nuclear weapons.

"Other measures must also be taken pending the total elimination of nuclear arsenals. Legally binding instruments should be developed with respect to a joint no-first-use undertaking between the nuclear-weapon States and as regards non-use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States - so called 'negative security assurances'.

"The conclusion of the Treaties of Tlatelolco, Rarotonga, Bangkok and Pelindaba, establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones, as well as the Antarctic Treaty, have steadily excluded nuclear weapons from entire regions of the world. The further pursuit, extension and establishment of such zones, especially in regions of tension, such as the Middle East and South Asia, represents a significant contribution to the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

"These measures all constitute essential elements which can and should be pursued in parallel: by the nuclear-weapon States among themselves; and by the nuclear-weapon States together with the non-nuclear-weapon States, thus providing a road map towards a nuclear-weapon-free world.

"The maintenance of a world free of nuclear weapons will require the underpinnings of a universal and multilaterally negotiated legally binding instrument or a framework encompassing a mutually reinforcing set of instruments.

"We, on our part, will spare no efforts to pursue the objectives outlined above. We are jointly resolved to achieve the goal of a world free from nuclear weapons. We firmly hold that the determined and rapid preparation for the post-nuclear era must start now."

In conclusion, I should like to request that the joint declaration I have just read out will be circulated as an official document of the Conference. We will submit the text in English and Spanish.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Sweden for his statement. I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil, Ambassador Lafer, on behalf of the Group of 21.

Mr. LAFER (Brazil): In my capacity as coordinator of the G-21, I was requested to make the following statement on behalf of the Group.

The G-21 reiterates that it continues to attach the highest priority to nuclear disarmament and to the need for the immediate establishment of an ad hoc committee on the subject in the CD.

The Group emphasizes the relevance of various proposals which call for the establishment of an ad hoc committee made by members of the G-21, such as those contained in documents: CD/1388, of 14 March 1996; CD/1419, of 7 August 1996; CD/1453, of 1 April 1997; CD/1462, of 5 June 1997; CD/1463, of 12 June 1997; CD/1483, of 20 January 1998; and CD/1534, containing the section on disarmament of the Cartagena ministerial declaration of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Group is of the view that the consultations you are undertaking, Sir, pursuant to the declaration and the decision contained respectively in documents CD/1500 and CD/1501 should lead this Conference to establish an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament forthwith.

Mr. HOFER (Switzerland): Mr. President, I would just like to remind the Conference that according to the tentative timetable which was adopted by the Conference last week, tomorrow morning at 10 a.m. open-ended informal consultations on expansion of membership will be held in this room.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Switzerland for his comments. This concludes my list of speakers for today.

The secretariat has circulated, at my request, a tentative timetable of meetings for the period 15-19 June 1998. This timetable was prepared in consultation with the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on security guarantees and the Special Coordinators. It is merely indicative and subject to change if necessary. On this understanding, may I assume that the timetable is acceptable?

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT: As announced at the beginning of this plenary meeting, I shall convene informal open-ended consultations on agenda item 1 in five minutes' time.

This concludes our business for today. The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 18 June 1998, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.